

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A DRAWN GAME.

BY BASIL.

AUTHOR OF "LOVE THE DEBT," ETC.

CHAPTER XXV. FOR EVER.

MRS. BOMPAS felt herself mistress of the situation. She was advancing towards Archie as her own, her long-lost boy, with much maudlin affection in her manner, when he rose to shrink from her so unmistakably that she at once resumed the offensive—the very offensive.

"Oh, we're Mr. Guard, are we? And I'm the dirt under your feet, am I? Me and my daughter to be trampled into the mud of the streets by the likes of you——"

"Ida, this is no place for you, dear; come," said Mrs. John, rising. Her tone cut Archie to the very heart. In all his life he could recall no word of hers that had not been loving and lovingly uttered. He opened the door for them to pass out, but Mrs. Bompas thrust herself forward and filled the doorway with arms akimbo.

"Not till I get back my letter. You shall not leave the room till I get my letter. I shall send for the police."

"Hold your tongue, woman!" cried Archie, exasperated to madness.

"Here is the letter," said Mrs. John, at the same moment, thus diverting the worthy woman from a savage retort upon Archie. She took the letter and sullenly retreated from the doorway. When Mrs. John and Ida had passed out and got clear into another room, Archie stepped into the hall, opened the front door, and called to Mrs. Bompas, who hurried forward with some alacrity, thinking he was about to come to terms with her.

"There's the door, Mrs. Bompas." Then the storm broke, and dirty weather it was. She abused him in Billingsgate, perfectly

audible to Mrs. John and Ida, who, in the study, were clinging together as in a common and crushing bereavement. Archie stood silent, holding the door open, while Mrs. Bompas poured a foul mixture of accusation and abuse upon him, and at its close, as she cooled, declared she had come to give him a chance to make honourable amends to her daughter, but now she would let the law take its course. Finally, as she departed, she flourished the packet of letters in his face, declaring she had evidence enough there to get a verdict from any jury in England.

Archie felt that she had, and he knew her too well to doubt her doing what she threatened, if it promised her the least advantage. He was as certain as if the writ had been served upon him, that before long, in court, he would be made the laughing-stock of the world. What did it matter? What did anything matter now? His world was Ida and his mother, and the thought of their scorn seemed to scorch into his brain. And to-day, an hour ago, their love, and such love, had been all his! He had flung himself on his bed with his face buried in the pillow, and the remembrance of the love he had lost paralysed thought. His sun had gone down at noon—dropped into midnight from meridian splendour, and his mind staggered about in the sudden blindness, groping helplessly in a world not realised.

He did not know how long he had lain thus, when a knock at the door roused him.

"Archie!"

"Yes, mother."

"May I come in?"

Archie rose, unlocked the door, opened it as in a dream, and stood haggard, stunned, looking years older, before her.

Mrs. John's remorse melted away at

sight of him. For this visit had been a matter of remorse to her. From Archie's letter, and still more from Mrs. Bompas's wild and whirling words, she had gathered that he had committed what, in her eyes, was one of the basest and blackest of all crimes—the betrayal and abandonment of a trusting girl. He had not contradicted the terrible impeachment, nay, its truth was written in guilt and in remorse in his face. Otherwise Mrs. John might well have thought, what any woman in the world would be sure to think, that in this case the daughter of such a creature as Mrs. Bompas was much more likely to have been the seducer than the seduced. But his silence, and his face, and the very misery that wrung her reluctant pity, put the thing beyond doubt.

If then he had done this cruel baseness—and there was no hope that he had not—ought she to treat it as of no account, to condone it, to condole with him upon it? If she could have helped herself, most certainly she would have left Archie to go alone through his wholesome anguish. But she could not help herself. She must go to him, as a doting mother must soothe the pain of the punishment she has inflicted, and almost in the moment of its infliction. But if Mrs. John could not help coming to share his trouble, she could not help either a sense of remorse as though she became thereby an abettor of his guilt.

This remorse, however, as we have said, melted at the sight of the white and blank despair in Archie's face. Setting down hurriedly the tray she had brought him—as he could not have had anything to eat or drink for some hours—she sat down on the nearest chair, covered her face with her hands, and cried almost hysterically, Archie standing the while silent before her.

At last she took her hands from her eyes to look up into his face, as though to read there that it was but a bad dream. And, indeed, there was in his frank, fearless, kindly face an assurance stronger than words that he could not do deliberately a base, and cruel, and cowardly thing.

"Oh, Archie, it is not true—say it is not true—what she said."

"I don't know what she said, mother. She could not have said more than the letters; and you read them. Did—did—"

Here he hesitated. But his mother read his thought.

"Ida? No, of course not. How could you think it? They weren't for her to read."

"They'll be for everyone to read soon."

"For everyone?"

"They'll be in every paper."

"Is she going to send them to the newspapers?" cried Mrs. John, aghast.

She hadn't overheard Mrs. Bompas's final threat of legal proceedings, which was not screamed out as loudly as her abuse.

"She's going to law about it."

"Going to law? To make money out of it!"

"She wants to make a promise to marry out of it."

"But did you mean to marry her?"

"Why, mother, you read the letters."

"I read only one, Archie, and I had no right to read that, dear, but I couldn't help it. But did you really mean to marry her?"

"Oh, I don't know what I meant. I was mad. Yes, I believe I should have married her."

"Oh, Archie!" she exclaimed, rising to fling her arms round him in her relief and in her remorse for having misjudged him, "oh, Archie, I am so glad—I'm so glad! How could I have thought it of you?"

"You couldn't have thought me worse than I was, mother. Yes, I should have been mad enough to marry her, I believe, if she hadn't found out that I was poor, and thrown me over for another fellow."

"But if it was she who gave you up, she's no case, has she?"

Mrs. John's natural shrewdness had been sharpened by constant exercise through doing duty daily for the Rev. John's mind, absent on perpetual leave.

"She didn't give me up. She kept me on, and him on, and half-a-dozen others, I dare say; but I don't suppose any of them were fools enough to put themselves in her power, as I did."

"By those letters? Don't you think she'd sell them?"

Archie threw himself into a seat with a gesture of despair.

"Sell them? Who's to buy them? Hasn't enough of the money you saved and pinched to give me gone to such creatures as these? And all the resolutions I had made, and meant to keep, and would have kept, to be at no more expense to you, to repay you all the expense I had been, to do something, to be something, that you would be proud of, that she—"

She'll never forgive me, mother," looking up despairingly into her face.

"She's terribly shocked, Archie, that you could engage yourself to the daughter of such a woman, and, at the same time, propose to her. She thinks it a just punishment on herself for making and breaking her own engagement so lightly. As if she could have helped either making it or breaking it!"

"She despises me," he groaned.

"Well, Archie," speaking hesitatingly, as breaking bad news, "I don't think she respects you as she did. You couldn't expect it. Of course she didn't suspect what I suspected, for the girl has no more ideas of such things than a baby. But that you should engage yourself to this low woman, and that you should then throw her aside so lightly, and offer her place to Ida!"

"Her place!"

"Or give Ida's place to her; for you told her you had loved her before you could have seen this girl. Oh, Archie! how could you so forget her and forget yourself?"

He walked up and down the room in a frenzy of agitation, and at last stopped suddenly face to face with his mother.

"I've lost her!" he cried miserably.

"I don't know what time may do," she answered doubtfully, and it was plain that this was the utmost she could say.

"Mother, do you think she'd see me?" he asked eagerly, after a pause.

"I don't think, Archie, I should ask her now, she feels so sore and sick at heart. You see, dear," laying her hand soothingly and apologetically upon his arm—"you see, dear, you told her over and over again that you had always loved her alone, and so got her to open out to you her whole heart and all its lifelong love for you, and now she finds you were all the time engaged to this woman."

"All the time! It was only a month's madness; and even through that month I loved Ida hopelessly, but with the only love worthy of the name."

"Yet you'd have married this woman?"

"Mother, you cannot understand—I cannot explain. I was mad, and this girl——"

Here he checked himself. There was much he might have told his mother about Anastasia, which would have gone a good way towards the justification, or at the least, towards the palliation of his conduct, but it would have been to put the whole

blame on the girl, at the cost, moreover, of making himself look ridiculous.

"Well, Archie, I shall do what I can for you with Ida," interpreting his hesitation as a magnanimous reluctance to throw the whole blame (where she was sure it was due) on the girl. "I'm afraid only time can do much—and yourself. You must win back her respect, Archie. Ida's love, more than that of most girls, leans on her respect. She couldn't have loved you as she did, if she hadn't thought as highly of you as she did."

This was true. Ida had canonized Archie, and now her god was proved an idol of clay. And it must be remembered that the girl had no idea of the two kinds of worship, which Archie just now assured his mother had co-existed in his heart. She had no idea of a higher and a lower kind of love, but only of one kind, whose root might be of the earth and in the earth—she never saw it—but whose flower filled her whole life with its incense. This, the sole kind of love she knew, was what she had given Archie, and this was what she thought Archie had given her.

In the full assurance of this belief, she, the most reserved of girls, had laid bare her whole heart to him, and let him see how every beat of it had been his for years! And all these years he had not only cared nothing for her, but had cared for the daughter of this woman! And then his vows, his passionate and repeated protestations that he had loved her alone, always!

The shock was as the shock of an earthquake, in which everything gives and goes together. The very foundations on which her life had rested seemed to slip from beneath her.

To many, Ida's innocence—or ignorance, if you will—must seem unnatural, and her prostration at this discovery of Archie's iniquities incredible. Was she a fool? Or had she never read a novel written by a lady? She was no fool, and she had read novels in which love was represented as something not quite divine, not quite human even; but she had read her own meaning into them. Pitch doesn't defile always; nay, the chemist extracts from it the most exquisite colours; and so, too, Ida gathered honey from the weed.

"I couldn't help going to him," said Mrs. John apologetically, on her return to Ida, sitting forlorn in her own room. "I couldn't help going to him, dear, and I am

glad I went. He's so wretched, and he hasn't behaved as badly as I thought."

"It wasn't true?" gasped Ida, half rising from her seat with an impetuosity startling in her.

"A great deal of it wasn't true."

"He wasn't engaged to her?"

"He was engaged to her, dear, but he was entrapped into the engagement. She was a very designing woman."

"Does he say so?" with a ring of scorn in her voice.

"That's not like you, Ida. Of course he didn't say so; but I inferred it from something he did say."

"Whatever she was, he must have loved her to engage himself to her."

"Loved her in a way."

"Only enough to engage himself to her," bitterly.

"It was a passing fancy, or rather frenzy. You cannot understand it; he can hardly understand it himself now; for now he knows what love really is."

"Since when, Mrs. Pybus? Since last Tuesday?"

"Ida, I do believe he did love you all along," Mrs. John rejoined, in answer to this satiric reference to Archie's protestations of past constancy. "But he despaired of your love, dear, and that made him reckless."

Of course Mrs. John more than half believed this theory herself, or she wouldn't have broached it; but she hardly expected Ida to believe it, or understand it even.

And Ida didn't. She had herself felt the despair of love, and knew in her own case its nature and its effect. It certainly was not to dispose her to love another. It made her shrink with almost abhorrence from the love of another. Still, had not she herself accepted another? This remembrance and remorse kept her silent though unconvinced. At the same time her passive and shrinking acceptance of Dick, under the compulsion of gratitude, was a very different thing from Archie's passionate pursuit of a creature so unworthy, as the daughter of this Mrs. Bompas must be.

This Ida felt, though she did not express it, or expressed it only through a silence which Mrs. John saw from her face was anything but assent.

"Well, Ida dear, time will tell."

"I think it has told, Mrs. Pybus."

"My dear child, you speak always as if you were my age. You should remember, my dear, that, though you were always a woman, he has been but a boy till now.

Now, this trouble has made him a man, and the hope to get your love back will make him a good man—if he may hope. He may, dear, mayn't he?" in a tone of low and pathetic entreaty. "It will make all the difference in his life if you let him hope to get back your love when he shows himself worthy of it."

"My love! I feel as if I had none now to give. I think it's gone. Everything's gone, I think."

Here the girl broke down utterly. Mrs. John, putting both her arms about her, soothed her like a little child with mingled kisses and words of love, till she brought her back at last to comparative calm.

Ida's love was not dead, of course. It was at least alive enough to make her hard and cold as steel to Archie the next morning. It was enough for so reserved and self-respecting a girl to have shown him her heart once with the result of such bitter mortification. Besides, the more she thought of it—and she had all the sleepless night through to think of it—the less could she see any justification, or extenuation even, of Archie's faithlessness. Either his love was worthless, or his vows were worthless. If, as Mrs. John suggested, he could love her and this girl at the same time, what was his love worth? And might not his heart be as easily and equally divided in the future as it had been in the past?

On the other hand, if he could love, and had loved this woman, with his whole heart, what then was the worth of his solemn protestations of past constancy to herself? It was impossible for a girl of so single and sincere a heart as Ida to conceive an escape from this dilemma.

For both these reasons, then—that she still loved Archie, and that she thought him still unworthy of her love—Ida was freezing in her bearing to him the next morning—the last morning of her stay.

He must, of course, see her alone before she left, to make out what case he could for himself, and, after a silent breakfast, Mrs. John left them together.

Ida sat still, cold, white as marble—to all appearances not in the least nervous, though every nerve in her body quivered. Archie, sitting opposite to her, with troubled eyes fixed on her face, sought some encouragement there in vain. The silence grew and deepened till the tension became intolerable, and Archie made at last a plunge of despair.

"Ida, I wanted to see you. I wanted to explain——" A pause. What intelligible explanation had he to give? "I—I think you are under a mistake."

"We have both made a mistake. I think there's no more to say," freezingly.

"There is—there is, Ida, if I could say it; if I could explain. I was mad when I wrote those letters. I didn't know what I said, or what I did. Besides—I cannot explain; but if you knew all I think you would forgive me. I know you would forgive me. You would let me hope—Ida, you will?" He rose as he spoke, and stood before her, and tried to take her hand. She withdrew it and rose also, more to fly from herself than from him.

"I am sorry to give you pain. I owe Mrs. Pybus so much. But you will soon forget it."

She seemed to speak with the utmost deliberation; yet she hardly knew what she said or she would have spoken more generously. Every word, as he interpreted it, was a stab.

"I was not suing you for a debt you owed my mother," he answered bitterly; "nor even for that you gave me yesterday and have forgotten to-day. It is not I who soon forget."

This reference to Ida's confession of her love was most unfortunate. It roused her pride to the reinforcement of her wavering resolution.

"I was mistaken," she said merely, but with a suspicion of scorn in her voice.

"Ida, it is now your mistake me. You will come to think so yet. I shall not give up that hope; I cannot. It is my life. I shall live in the hope that if I prove myself what you once thought me, you will be to me again all that you were. Now, I ask you only to wait and to think of me as kindly as you can." Here he paused, but Ida remained silent also for a moment, and then said:

"I have so much kindness to thank you for, that I cannot think otherwise of you; but as to our engagement, it is best there should be no misunderstanding that it is at an end."

"For ever?" piteously.

"For ever," in a low and tremulous voice.

In another moment she would have broken down, and Archie might have read his reprieve in her tears, and wrung it from her lips, if the fear of such a self-betrayal had not hurried her from the room. Hurried her? No. She turned hurriedly

from him, but walked to the door with her usual calm stateliness, and not till it was closed behind her did she fly, as from herself, to her room, to lock herself in alone with her misery, excluding even Mrs. John.

It would be hard to say which of the two had the more wretched hour; nor was their trouble lessened by the thought that they had brought it upon themselves—for Ida also felt that it was in some sense self-inflicted. But what could she have done? Had she answered Archie's piteous appeal otherwise, it would have been simply to make over again a confession of her love.

She was not the girl to wear her heart upon her sleeve a second time, to feed this youth's reckless vanity.

CHRONICLES OF ENGLISH COUNTIES.

SHROPSHIRE. PART II.

WHEN the lion and the unicorn, as the old ditty has it, were fighting for the crown, and axe and sword were thinning the ranks of the feudal nobility, even among the storm and stress of civil war and commotion, the civic life of our English towns had developed to its fullest life of picturesqueness and dignity. And thus old Shrewsbury, towards the close of the turbid, tumultuous fifteenth century, shows forth with a pomp of civic pride that impresses the imagination. All the picturesque elements of the mediæval days, which were coming to an end, were tinged with the colour and brightness of the dawning renaissance. The walls that surrounded the city, the massive towers, and grass-grown ramparts with the cannon peering from the battlements, gave an element of compactness and security; and the narrow streets, with the tall, overhanging timber-houses, afforded vistas of chequered light, and deep and gloomy shadows in which the gleam of arms and the glow of rich trappings found an appropriate setting. There stood the grand old abbey, with its wealth of monuments and shrines, the friaries with their brethren of the cowl, whose gowns of black and grey gave a foil and contrast to the civic state of the citizens and the gay apparel of the citizens' wives. With all this was a constant dramatic change of incident and personage, now a nobleman marching to the scaffold, again a king entering in the pomp of his power.

The greatest day of the year in old

Shrewsbury was the feast of Corpus Christi, which still stirs old-fashioned Norman towns to a pageantry that recalls the old English life that has passed away. Then would all the houses be festooned with hangings—rich silk and cloth of gold for the wealthy, and the household store of bleached linen, white and radiant, for the rest—while the procession slowly filed through the narrow streets, the great golden crozier in front, and the Lord Abbot, under a silken canopy, bearing in his hands the jewelled Pyx. Followed him all the brotherhood, prior and chamberlain, treasurer and sacrist, in all the dignity of violet and gold, the humble friars in their coarse gowns and sandals, the mayor and the elders of the town, and the guilds with their brave banners and quaint emblems. At every step the silver censers swayed and swung, and through the smoke of incense over a path of flowers and twigs the procession advanced till halting at some temporary altar, adorned with all the silver vessels and rich plate of some solid citizen and his friends, the jewelled Pyx would be raised, and all the assemblage would fall on their knees before it—richly caparisoned knights with bright armour gleaming beneath silken trappings, beggars in their rags, the venerable citizens, the urchins from St. Peter's School, the little girls in white or blue, with their aprons full of flowers—while the cannon sounded from the walls, and the bells rang in volleys from all the church-towers.

Such was old Shrewsbury, in 1485, the year following that which had seen the Duke of Buckingham's execution on the tall scaffold before the high cross in Shrewsbury market-place. After that high-handed exertion of kingly power, people felt that Richard's crown sat secure upon his brows. Some, here and there, might grieve for the hapless fate of the young princes in the Tower, and prophesy in secret that no good could come of a reign so inaugurated—

Things had begun make strong themselves by ill ;
but the general sentiment acknowledged
the want of a strong ruler, and the terrible
evils which had followed a long minority,
when first one set of rapacious nobles, and
then another, ruled the destinies of the
country, were still fresh in men's minds.

Woe to that land that's governed by a child,
says one of Shakespeare's citizens in
Richard the Third. And it might well be
the general feeling among the commonalty
and the citizens of the chief towns of

the kingdom, that they owed a hearty acquiescence to a ruler who had saved the country from such a dangerous pass. And yet all this time the end of the king was prepared. A keen and strong-minded woman had pitted herself against Richard with his vigorous genius, and the woman was destined to triumph. This woman was Margaret, the mother of Henry, the young Earl of Richmond, at that time an exile in France. Margaret was of the blood of the Beauforts, the descendants of John of Gaunt and Catharine Swynford, and her son was the last representative of the house of Lancaster, although he held as much to the line of Valois as to that of Plantagenet, and was rather a Welshman than either through his ancestor Owen Tudor. The Welsh descent of the prince proved a strong point in his favour. All along the line of the Welsh coast the emissaries of the young pretender to the throne found shelter and welcome ; and when the moment of action arrived, the flotilla of the young prince found a safe and friendly harbour in Wales, protected from all danger of surprise by the bulwark of a whole nation. The Welsh, it may be judged, went solidly for their countryman, and all the future king's cousins, many of them but simple farmers and cattle dealers, but all with the pride and long pedigree of their race, formed useful agents and recruits. And then Margaret had been busy among the great families of the land, uneasy at the new state of things : a popular king depending upon the commonalty and citizens, and sending great nobles to the block with a word. Margaret had married, no doubt with strategical motives directed to this very issue, Lord Stanley, whose power in the districts of Lancashire and Cheshire was sufficient to have seriously threatened any advance on the part of the invaders beyond the Welsh mountains, while the Talbots had been gained over by Margaret's subtle influence, a family which could raise in Shropshire itself between two and three thousand fighting men.

But of all this plot the men of Shrewsbury can have known little, and must have been rather astonished, one day in August, to see a strong mixed force of armed men marching from the side of Wales towards their gates. The strong castle of Shrewsbury was then held for the king by a Mytton, one of a Shropshire family noted for a vigorous and eccentric individuality down to our own times. When the heralds in advance of the little army demanded that

gates should be opened and drawbridges lowered to receive his majesty, King Henry the Seventh of England and Wales, the bailiff stoutly replied that he knew of no king but King Richard, who had given him this charge, and he swore a great oath that if any entered the place it must be over his (the bailiff's) body. But these brave words were changed for excuses when the bailiff saw that all the great people of the country round were coming in to greet the newly-arrived prince, and then Bailiff Mytton at once fulfilled the terms of his oath, and paid acceptable homage to the now rising sun, by prostrating himself before Henry and requesting the prince to make a stepping-stone of his body. And so the king entered the gates of old Shrewsbury amid the joyous shouts of the Welsh, who saw in this the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies of Merlin and Taliesin that one day the sovereignty of Britain should come back to the British nation :

No more our long-lost Arthur we bewail.
All hail, ye genuine kings, Britannia's issue,
hail !

The prince's army soon passed on to meet Richard, who was mustering his array at Nottingham; but the mixed assemblage—Bretons, Normans, French, and wild Welshmen from the hills—had left behind them an evil legacy in the shape of a terrible plague which devastated the town and afterwards spread over the country under the name of the sweating sickness.

The Tudors had given place to the Stuarts, the Welsh to the Scotch, before Shrewsbury again became a place of historic importance. And, in the meantime, what changes in the old place ! The abbey was a ruin, and only a fragment of its church still remained; the monks and friars had been replaced by Presbyterian and Independent preachers. When Charles the First, after raising his standard at Nottingham, made Shrewsbury his headquarters, he found a community strongly divided in opinion as to the merits of his cause. However, he found the castle on its commanding rock strong and well fortified. The walls were put in a state of defence, and a mint was established, in which, as fast as the loyal people of the country brought in their silver plate, it was turned into coin and devoted to the expenses of the war. But while the Royal cause was dependent on these casual and trivial

sources, the Parliament had all the machinery of taxation at its disposal, and levied its assessments with all the regularity of peaceful times—sometimes even from districts which were actually occupied by the king's troops.

In Shropshire itself there was a strong party for the Parliament, at the head of which was Colonel Mytton, a descendant, no doubt, of the stout bailiff or sheriff of other days. Mytton was member for Shrewsbury in the Long Parliament, and even if he no longer retained the confidence of his constituents, they had no chance of a bye-election in which to express their opinion. In fact, the colonel was in command of a hostile garrison at Wem, about eleven miles to the northwards of Shrewsbury, scheming how he could best pay a visit to his constituents. He had beaten off several attacks from the king's garrison, and presently judged that the time was ripe for reprisals.

On a dark winter's night the colonel set out from Wem with about two hundred and fifty foot and as many horse, and they marched secretly and silently along the highway, till they came in sight of the lights that burned here and there in guard-room and bivouac within the lines of Shrewsbury. The attempt to surprise a place so strongly guarded seemed foolhardy in the extreme; but, possibly, the Parliamentarians had a secret intelligence with some one within the walls which made the enterprise less desperate than it looked.

The site of Shrewsbury, almost encircled by the river, is protected at the neck of the isthmus by the bold brown rock on which stands the castle, whose ancient strength may be judged from its present remains; and the space between rock and river, where the road from Wem entered the town, was guarded by a strong palisade in front of the old city gate. Happily for the Parliamentary troops, they were rich in artisans, and eight undaunted men, accustomed to wield hammer and saw as well as pike and musket, had already volunteered as a kind of forlorn hope. A boat was obtained and rowed quietly up the stream, when the eight men disembarked on the inner side of the palisade and began to saw and hack at the barrier. The sentinels, puzzled at first, and perhaps thinking that here were men employed by their own engineers, at length fired upon the carpenters, and the alarm was given. But in the meantime a prac-

licable breach had been made, Mytton's dismounted troopers stormed in, their preacher, the Rev. Mr. Huson, among the first, the infantry followed, and all rushed for the market-place, where the main guard was stationed, who all were made prisoners before they had recovered from their bewilderment; the other posts were seized in like manner; and as daylight came the Parliamentarians were in undisputed possession of all the town. The castle, indeed, still held out, but made only a faint resistance, and surrendered before noon. The governor, however, refused quarter, and died sword in hand, but the lieutenant-governor escaped, to join the Royal forces, and was thereupon tried by court-martial soon after, and hanged for negligence and cowardice.

Another victim of the siege of Shrewsbury, according to local tradition, was a certain Colonel Benbow, who having deserted the Parliament for the King, was shot on the green before the castle. The Benbows had once been citizens of importance in the town, but had lost all their substance either by their loyalty or their improvidence, and the nephew of the victim of the Civil War was apprenticed to a mariner who traded from the port of Bristol. Young Benbow, either by marrying his master's daughter, or by other recognised means of promotion, came in time to command a vessel for himself, and in 1686 we find him in command of the Benbow frigate, an armed trader, not bearing the king's commission, but an awkward customer to tackle for all that. On her voyage the ship was attacked by a Saltee rover. Benbow fought his ship gallantly, and when the Moors ran aboard him and swarmed upon his deck, he and his men beat them off and killed thirteen of the pirates. The heads of his fallen enemies Benbow ordered to be cut off and thrown into a tub of pork-pickle, intending them perhaps as an ornament for his cottage home in England. But on his entering the port of Cadiz, the Spanish officials overhauled the ship, and suspecting contraband in the carefully headed-up cask, broke it open, and discovered Benbow's grisly trophies. The fame of this discovery reached the King of Spain, who, delighted with Benbow's courage and modesty, recommended the sailor to the notice of his own King James. The English king gave Benbow a commission in the royal navy, and Benbow won his way, by sheer courage and perseverance, to the command

of a squadron. And in 1702, in a sea-fight with French and Spaniards, Benbow beat off a superior force and held the sea, although deserted by the captains of his own fleet. His leg was cut off by a cannon-ball, but Benbow still kept on deck and gave orders to his seamen; a circumstance commemorated in many popular ballads.

In its existing state Shrewsbury still retains much of its ancient aspect. With all its vicissitudes the town has never suffered seriously from fire—that great enemy of antiquity which sooner or later devours the relics that time has spared. And so the town has many ancient houses, and quaint narrow streets, and picturesque vistas. Remains may, perhaps, still be discovered of the ancient mansion or palace of the Welsh Princes of Powys, whose heiress in the thirteenth century married a Norman, one John de Charlton. The old mansion of the Charltons afterwards was turned into a theatre, and here in the palmy days of the provincial stage, the Shakespearian drama was always welcomed, especially the First Part of Henry the Fourth, when Falstaff's speech, "We fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock," was sure to bring down the house. The clock in question, to whose solemn chime Shakespeare himself may have listened, is no doubt that on the great western tower of the abbey church; and the old nave of the abbey church is still impressive with its solemn Norman arches, and huge, round, squat columns. The church narrowly escaped being made a cathedral in the days of the Reformation, when Dr. Bouchier, the last abbot of Leicester, was actually nominated to the see, but the proceeds of the vast possessions of the monasteries had been spent before the scheme was perfected.

On the ruins of the ancient college of St. Peter's, which came to an end with the abbey that supported it, rose the celebrated grammar-school of Shrewsbury, which, with its rich endowments and renown for scholarship, holds high place among the great public schools of the country. The quaint Jacobean quadrangle has seen full many a sprightly race of schoolboys pass out into the great world, where many have held their places with honour—none so generally distinguished perhaps as one of the earlier scholars of the foundation, the brilliant Sir Philip Sidney, while few have been more notorious than the typical bad boy of the school, the infamous Judge Jeffreys.

We may leave Shrewsbury either by the Welsh or English bridge, both of them handsome structures of the eighteenth century. By the former we shall soon reach the Welsh borders, with little of interest on the way unless we turn aside at Westbury to visit the ruins of Caux Castle, an ancient border fortress, built by the Corbets, whose mound affords a fine view of all the country round. In the name of this castle we have a curious reminder of the pleasant Norman country, the original home of the founders of the castle. For the Corbets were anciently De Caux, from their possessions in the Pays de Caux, the land whose white cliffs glitter over the sea between Havre and Dieppe, and they named their castle, Caux Castle, after their fatherland. The name Caux suggested Corbeau, and the family losing sight of the original meaning of the word, adopted the raven as their crest, and became known as Corbet—are still known, indeed, as an influential family in the county which takes its share with the Myttons in local celebrity and sporting traditions.

From this point northwards along the border, there is only Oswestry to require any particular mention, a town whose name embodies a morsel of early history. It is Oswald's town, called after the old Northumbrian King so dear to popular tradition as St. Oswald, who here met his fate in a battle with the fierce heathen Penda, of the Mercians. A memory this that carries us away from this pleasant pretty country to Oswald's fortress town on the stern Northumbrian coast, where Bamborough frowns over the northern seas. The scene of the battle may probably be looked for in the meadows about the town. Old Oswestry, a fine ancient earthwork, was probably only a British stronghold, and the Welsh, whose nomenclature may generally be trusted, do not connect the place with Oswald, but call it *Caer Ogyrfau*. There are only slight remains of Oswestry Castle, which was built by the Fitzalans, a family which is reasonably supposed to have furnished the Steward of Scotland, who founded the royal line of Stuart.

More lasting after all than the strong stone castles of the Normans, the earthworks of earlier races are thickly studded everywhere in this debateable land, while the names of places, now Welsh, now English, and now an undistinguishable corruption of one or the other, show how

the border-line has wavered to and fro. Selattyn may be either Welsh or English, and Gobowen, which is clearly Welsh, but not a pleasing specimen, may be matched with Porkington, which has a truly Saxon intonation. Offa's Dyke and Watt's Dyke are still to be traced over field and moorland; of the meaning of which, with all our modern research, we know about as much as did Poet Churchward of Queen Elizabeth's days—a Shropshire worthy he, by the way—who writes:

There is a famous thing
Calde Offaes Dyke, that reacheth farre in length.

Wat's Dyke, likewise, about the same was set,
Between which two both Danes and Britons met,
And traffuke still; but passing boundes by sleight,
The one did take the other prisoner straight.

Another of these border towns is Ellesmere, among a nest of small lakes, which once boasted a strong royal castle, on a commanding brow. The castle is gone, but the castle hill commands a noble view over portions, it is said, of nine adjacent counties. Whitchurch, near the Cheshire border, a cheerful little modern town, had also its strong castle, and its church contains the bones of the famous John Talbot, the scourge of the French.

Where is the great Alcides of the field,
Valiant lord Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury,
Knight of the noble order of St. George,
Worthy St. Michael and the Golden Fleece,
Great Mareschal to Henry the Sixth,
Of all his wars within the realm of France?

Well, here he lies, while a battered effigy, which hardly retains a semblance of form or feature, is all that remains of the once proud monument that recited his honours and achievements.

From Whitchurch the road, alike with rail and river, makes through the centre of the county, with fine parks and pleasant scenery, but no great centres of interest. We must cross Watling Street again—at Wellington, we will say, where the town has taken its name from the street, having originally been Watling town. And here, near the Staffordshire border, we have Shifnall, an ancient little town of the industrial kind, with furnaces and mines all about; and close by is Tong, with its castle, and then on the very verge of the county, Boscobel, with its famous royal oak.

There is a foreign ring about the name of Boscobel which is rather puzzling till we find the reason of it. It seems that one John Giffard built this house among the woods, some time in the reign of the first James, when foreign influences had begun

to be felt among the English gentry, and the courtier fashions of France and Italy were leavening the boisterous hospitality native to the soil. At the house-warming feast, one of the guests, Sir Basil Brooke, of Madeley Court, having just returned from Italy, named the house Boscobello or Fairwood, which happy name was forthwith adopted by acclamation. The Giffards were staunch Roman Catholics, and Boscobel was partly designed as a refuge and hiding-place for such of their communion as were in danger. Surrounded by woods, and at a distance from any main-road, the very existence of the place was little known out of the immediate neighbourhood. The wooden framework of the house was in places made double, with a secret chamber between, and other less commodious hiding-places were contrived between the joists of the flooring. During the civil wars the house had sheltered sundry Cavaliers in their progress from camp to camp, and although long unoccupied by its proprietors, the place was looked after by trusty servants well affected to the right cause.

Thus, when Lord Derby, a fugitive from his own county of Lancaster, struck across the country to join his royal master, who was marching southwards with his Scotch allies, he found lodging and concealment on his dangerous way at Boscobel; and when Charles, after the lost battle of Worcester, found himself a fugitive amid a hostile population, Lord Derby, who rode with him, suggested this house at Boscobel as an excellent hiding-place during the first heat of pursuit. Lord Derby guided the King to the place, and then, with a fine sense of loyalty, rode on to his doom, for a more prudent man would have kept the hiding-place for his own use, and left the King to shift for himself.

At Boscobel Charles found faithful servants ready to help in his escape. He slept one night in the priest's cupboard, and part of one day he spent among the branches of an oak-tree that grew in the midst of dense underwood. Cromwell's troopers were riding up and down the open tracks in the woods, and voices could be heard occasionally as of persons approaching; but it was yet early in September; the trees were still in full leaf, while patches here and there of the russet tinge of autumn bewildered the eyes of the searchers. The way of escape which first suggested itself was down the Severn to Bristol, there to take shipping; but it

was feared that there was little chance of avoiding recognition in that nest of malignants. From one country house to another, sometimes disguised as a woman, sometimes as a groom riding with his mistress behind on a pillion, Charles was guided to the coast of Dorset. At Charmouth he narrowly escaped capture. His horse had cast a shoe, and was taken to the village blacksmith. "This horse has but three shoes," said the smith, "and they were all set in different counties, and one in Worcestershire." The hostler put this and that together, and told his suspicion to the minister of the place, one Mr. Westley—the ancestor, it seems, of the celebrated founder of Methodism—and the minister did his best to stop the King. However, Charles managed to get away, and over the downs to Brighton, where he found honest Captain Tattersal, who took the king on board his vessel at Shoreham. And it was noted that at the very hour when Charles, his troubles over, was gaily sailing over a sunny sea, his faithful servant, Lord Derby, was standing on the scaffold in Bolton market-place.

Boscobel is still standing in very much its ancient state, and, with its oak, is one of the show-places of the district, although, perhaps, the fervid interest with which it was once regarded has a good deal abated. The faithful servitors who did so much for Charles were not forgotten at the Restoration. Richard Penderil, or Trusty Dick as he was called, was entertained at court, and a handsome rent-charge was settled upon the family, which, it seems, there are descendants still left to claim.

Striking across country to the Severn valley again, and passing by the coal and iron districts of Coalbrook Dale and Ironbridge, we come to the pleasant town of Bridgenorth, famed, like Pisa, for its leaning tower. The noble red sandstone rock, on which the castle and the upper part of the town are built, seems to mark the place for a stronghold commanding the course of the river, while caverns, cellars, and dwellings hollowed in the rock, appear to testify to the existence of an earlier race of inhabitants, who had a fancy for cave dwellings. As a Saxon settlement it clearly owed its importance to its bridge over the Severn, which may have been built by the Romans originally, and the town might very well have happened to have been called Bruges, as the name is sometimes spelt in old charters, only that the more important part of the town, on

the Welsh side of the river, was called Brugge, north, to distinguish it from the lower town. The busy Ethelfleda, the "virgo virago" of the old chronicler, left her mark here, in the fortress she raised against the Danes, although it is generally thought that her "burg" was not on the site of the castle rock, but on a partly artificial mount, known by the curious name of Panpudding Hill. Some modern antiquaries might see in this last name traces of the "ing," or mark of the Panpuddas, but a more natural explanation is to be sought in the shape of the hill, which may be held to resemble a pudding, well risen, baked in a round pan. Anyhow the great Norman chieftain, Roger of Montgomery, speedily utilised the great rock for a strong castle, which, like Shrewsbury, more than once sustained a siege against the kingly power. The first siege, by Henry the First, when the castle held out for wicked Robert of Belême, is noticeable for the stand made by the native English against the Norman nobles. The great Norman chiefs were reluctant to press a brother in arms to extremity. But the English fighting men assembled to the number of three thousand, and thus addressed the King: "Sir King, regard not what these traitors say. We will support you, and never leave you till your foe is brought alive or dead to your feet." And the English were as good as their word, and from that time forth the rapacity and lawlessness of the great barons were sensibly checked.

The second siege of Bridgenorth was when Roger de Mortimer, a strong adherent of the late king, Stephen, held King Henry the Second at bay from the trilateral defended by his three castles, Wigmore, Cleobury, and Brug or Bridgenorth. Cleobury was soon taken and destroyed, but Brug held out for more than two months, and Henry narrowly escaped death by an arrow from its walls. Thomas à Becket was present at this siege, for his signature is found attached to documents which are dated from the siege of Brug.

Town and castle, too, stood out stoutly in later days for King Charles. When the town was stormed the garrison retreated to the castle, pursued, it is said, by showers of missiles from the inhabitants, who were mostly for the Parliament, and the governor, either in revenge for this treatment or to aid his defence, set the town on fire, so that it was almost entirely destroyed. The castle was carried at last

by sap and mine; and to this we owe the leaning tower which remains as a solitary witness to the storm and stress of those evil days. Evil days for Bridgenorth at least, which was long in recovering from the destruction wrought upon it.

The town began to look up with the increase of trade and manufacture in the north, when it became a port, whence the cloths of Lancashire and the pottery of Staffordshire were conveyed to Bristol. But although poor Bridgenorth can no longer attempt to vie with Liverpool as a shipping centre, yet it enjoys a certain snug prosperity of its own, and may still point with pride to the opinion of King Charles the First, who was eminently a man of taste, that it was one of the pleasantest places in his dominions.

SIR WILLIAM DOUGLAS.

"SIR WILLIAM DOUGLAS;" nothing more, carved on the old grey stone,
Deep in the lush green boskage, by lichens overgrown.

"Sir William Douglas." Quietly the good knight lies asleep,
Where the great oaks, like sentinels, their watch around him keep.

There in the flush of spring-time, the primrose stars the grass,
And the wild birds on the hawthorn light, as to their nests they pass.

There in the golden summer eves, the lingering lovers come,
And tell the sweet old story, as they rest beside his tomb.

There fall the leaves of autumn, all russet, gold, and red,
And, like a monarch's jewelled robe, bedeck his lonely bed.

And when the wind of winter, the wood around him rocks,
And deepens to an angry roar, the babble of the Brox,

Wide sweeping from their mountain-home, the whirlwinds of the north,
Lash into leaping, tossing foam, the glittering waves of Forth,

That crash upon the fair green Links, and thunder faint and far,
Where from its height the massive Hold looks down upon Dunbar.

Yet undisturbed the soldier lies, while the seasons come and go,
While the roses laugh at Broxmouth, or the Lomonds couch in snow.

And no man knows his story—if he fell in fray forgot,
Where in the wild hill passes, Elliott met Ker or Scott.

Or in the furious battle, where Dunse looks grimly down,
Where on the storied plain below, the Stuart staked his crown;

When, urged by fool and fanatic, brave Leslie left his stand,
And Cromwell sternly smiled to see his foemen "in his hand;"

Dying for king and country, as die a Douglas should?

None know, for very silently he lies in Broxmouth wood.

And only strangers tracking the ferny paths alone,

Pause, to muse a wondering moment, on a name, and on a stone.

TRAVELS IN THE EAST.

PART V.

LEAVING the owner of the "armonium" in her rickety old dwelling, with the expression of a hope that a sudden puff of wind—not to contemplate an earthquake—might not bring it tumbling down about her ears, we went upon our way through the wilds of the far East. A few minutes' brisk walking brought us to the foot of a little flight of stairs, which we proceeded to ascend for a dozen feet or so, until, on entering a small room, we found ourselves in presence of a neat little old lady, whose hair was nearly white, and who was sitting hard at work.

Everything about the chamber looked most scrupulously clean, forming a marked contrast to the house we had just left. Fully one half of the floor was covered by the bedstead, and a tiny strip of carpet was laid upon the rest. The bare boards, where revealed, appeared as though the scrubbing-brush were not a chance acquaintance, but a constant friend and visitor. Equally well scrubbed was the top of the small table which stood beneath the window, and which, except the bedstead, and no fewer than seven chairs, was all the furniture displayed. The number of these chairs a little puzzled me at first, for I had learned that the only other dweller in the room was another neat old lady, who was out in quest of work. But overhearing a stage-whisper about certain "better days," and a husband who had charge of "fifteen hundred lamps" (whereof that of Aladdin, alas! had not been one), I concluded that the chairs were kept as relics of the past, and possibly at midnight were filled by a select society of ghosts.

A tiny fire was flickering in a tidily-kept grate—the spelling of the last word must be carefully attended to, for the adjective would be completely out of place. So very little heat was engendered by the process that the fire appeared to flicker merely for form's sake. The amount of coal expended at that slow rate of consumption could hardly have exceeded a farthing's-worth a day. A small kettle stood silent by the side of the small fire;

indeed, thrice the heat emitted could have scarcely made it sing. In front, by way of hearthrug, lay a solemn-looking cat, who appeared, like his old mistress, to be saddened by the memory of departed better days. By way of decoration, he wore a bright brass collar, which had probably been saved when the fortunes of the family had been untimely wrecked. Excepting the worn wedding-ring adorning the old lady, the cat's collar was the only ornament or jewellery displayed in the apartment, or upon the person of either of its inmates.

"Ah," sighed the old lady, "I wasn't born like this, you know," and her statement, taken literally, must have been quite true. "I've lived like a lady," she continued rather sadly, "for I kept a servant once." This she added as a proof of her ladylike existence, and to show us what high altitude her rank had once attained. She still kept up her old position in society, and abstained from the word "sir" when she addressed me or my guide. She claimed plainly some distinction from the poor folk who lived near her, at whom, indeed, I fancy I detected a slight shadow of a sneer, when I tried to compliment her on the cleanness of her room. "Ah yes," she replied with a smile of satisfaction, "you see I've always been brought up to it. When I kept my servant I was always used to seeing things kept nice, and clean, and tidy. I could never live in a litter as those poor people do, you know."

Those poor people! Poor old lady! And she, perhaps, among the poorest of the poor, and daily working her old fingers to the bone that she might live. But who could smile at her small vanity, in the sight of her sad poverty and the terrible privation which appeared so bravely borne? And who could help admiring her persevering cleanliness, and tidiness, and neatness, in all the trial and the trouble of her sorely fallen fortune and her sadly faded life? Surely, in despite of all the darkness of her days, she had set a bright example to some of "those poor people" who appear to hold that poverty must be allied with dirt, and that they must be slovenly because they are not rich.

Fallen from her high estate, wherein she kept a servant, and had been mated to the keeper of fifteen hundred lamps—the provider of enlightenment, if not himself a brilliant man—the old lady, while she prattled, kept her needle briskly going, and her white hairs low bowed down over

a coarse but clean blue shirt. Such garments it was now her fate to "finish," as she phrased it—a process which involved the cutting and the stitching of half-a-dozen button-holes, the sewing on of seven buttons, and the final stitching of a pair of flaps and cuffs. A farthing a shirt was all the wages she received; but even this was not all profit, for there had to be deducted the cost of the cotton, whereof a penny reel was barely sufficient for the finishing of four-and-twenty shirts. By working pretty hard for fourteen hours at a sitting, she could contrive to finish, say, two dozen in the day, and the rent she and her friend (who was a single lady still, and had likewise seen better days) were forced to pay for their small room, was just defrayed by finishing ten dozen every week. Thus the labour of five days of fourteen hours work apiece was entirely devoted to the sum due to the landlord, in so far as one of the two workers was concerned, and on her remnant of the work, and on the week's work of the other, the pair of poor old ladies were dependent for their clothing, and their firing, and their food.

There were three other small rooms in the house which these old ladies had honoured by their residence; and each of these small rooms was separately tenanted, and, indeed, might truly be regarded as a home. All the occupants were absent, excepting a stray child or so, too small to seek for work; but a peep into their rooms sufficed to prove that the old ladies were unrivalled in possession of a clean and tidy home.

Desirous of a contrast, I bethought me of a dustman, whose home perhaps might indicate his trade, and possibly show traces of the dirt wherewith he dwelt. As a cobbler's wife proverbially seldom goes well shod, so a dustman's wife might rarely see her room undimmed by dust. Moreover, I had heard in my youth a comic story about a dustman whose profession, I remember, was made to rhyme with "fust man," to whom—i.e., to Adam—his pedigree was briefly, but ingeniously traced. By a sudden freak of memory the refrain of this old ditty flashed across my mind, and I felt impelled to ask if there were dustmen in the neighbourhood, that I might visit the abode of one, and make a mental note of what was comical about it.

My wish was granted as readily as a whim is in a fairy-tale. Without the aid of any magical appliance for our transport, such, for instance, as the moving-carpet of

Prince Ahmed, half-a-dozen minutes after quitting the poor shirt-maker sufficed to bring us to the dwelling whereof I was in quest. It stood at the far end of a filthy cul de sac, which formed a little outlet from a rather narrow street; the beauty of whose aspect was not rendered more attractive by a quantity of clothes'-lines, whereon were dangling sundry garments which hardly looked much cleaner for having been to the wash. One side of the court, which bore a royal title, comprised some six or seven extremely shabby tenements—they really seemed too small to be spoken of as houses—while in the middle of the other stood a rusty iron post, which proved, upon a nearer view, to be a dirty pump. This was flanked to right and left by sundry little squares of brickwork, whose chief purpose seemed to be the emission of bad smells. In some of these small out-buildings lay a little heap of cinders or a lump or two of coal; and in the corners there were gathered a few useless odds and ends, which might have well been shot as rubbish on the dust-heap that was near, although then hidden from our sight. As we were afterwards informed, all the dwellers in the court threw their dirt into one dust-bin; and this being used in common by two score or so of people, and very seldom emptied more than twice a month, perhaps it was no wonder that by following our noses we soon found out its whereabouts, and were able to acknowledge that it really seemed to focus all the foul smells of the court.

On the loose and broken tiles which formed the roof of these out-buildings, sat an evil-eyed, torn-eared, and mangy-looking cat. Pointing "the pleased ear," or, at any rate, its tatters, and wagging "the expectant tail," as well as could be wished in its abbreviated state, he looked wistfully at somebody, who probably was eating something, in a room which was just level with the roof whereon he sat. Presently this somebody, invisible to us, through a broken pane of glass pitched a small piece of potato, which with great alacrity was pounced on by poor puss. He instantly was joined by two other torn-eared cats, whose coats sadly wanted brushing, and whose general appearance showed a life much out of luck. Another morsel of potato being chucked out on the roof, there ensued forthwith the freest of free feline fights for its possession, and we were left to fancy what a battle would ensue were a pennyworth of cat's-meat thrown

before the combatants, who clearly found it difficult in that poorly-feeding district to save themselves from starving by the few mice they could catch.

Of the Home of the Happy Dustman (happy because exempt by law from Sunday labour) a pretty picture might be made for a pious magazine; but I shall not attempt to draw upon my fancy for any such a work. The sketch I here present was made upon the spot, and though some few minor details may have escaped my notice, the points of special picturesqueness have been faithfully preserved. I abstain from highly colouring the plain pencilling I made, and from blackening the description by extra work with pen and ink.

The door of the house was open, and the door of the room likewise, which was on the ground-floor, there being one floor over it. This room—of ten feet square, say—formed the Happy Dustman's Home, and gave shelter to his wife and two young dustmen of the future, who at present were small boys. In the doorway stood a woman of about four or five and fifty, somewhat frowsy and ill-favoured, who, although the doors were open, did not bid us come in. On the contrary, indeed, she did her best to keep us out, alleging as a reason that the place was "in a litter," which recalled to me the literary dustman of the song. She likewise urged as her excuse that she was "tidyin' up a bit," for her daughter was engaged in working at "the 'Eaps." We said politely that we were sorry for the absence of the lady; but that, though we were denied the pleasure of her company, we hoped we might enjoy the privilege of entrance to her room. This at length was granted with a grunt, which might have been mistaken for a negative reply to our request. But we construed the sound otherwise, and passed the threshold of the home, with a promise to make due excuse for its untidy state. "You see," said the old woman, "she lef' it in a litter, bein' a bit 'urried like for gettin' to the 'Eaps," and, indeed, throughout the conversation which ensued, continual hints were dropped about the litter being "temp'ry," and soon to be set right by the task of "tidying up."

Tidying up! Well, yes. It clearly was not quite a needless operation, to judge from the first glance. The confusion we had witnessed in the house of the good Creole was as order to the chaos which we discovered here. "A place for everything and everything in its place;" this was the

rule of life enjoined me in my youth, and a vast saving of time this fine old-fashioned maxim is certain, if adhered to, to foster and induce. Here the rule of life observed was precisely the reverse. "A place for nothing, and nothing in its place." Such seemed to have been the happy dustman's happy thought, when asked what was his notion of a motto for a household; and considerable pains appeared to have been taken in obeying its behest.

The dirty floor was partly hidden by small scraps of dirty sacking, which chiefly served to make the bare boards look more bare. Dirty bits of sacking lay also on the bedstead, and formed, indeed, the bed-linen, for there were neither blanket, nor counterpane, nor sheets. The substitutes were anything but sightly to behold, as they lay all heaped and huddled anyhow, in what a tidy mistress would have termed a "horrid mess." A limp bolster and lean pillow lay also on the bed, and might, perhaps, have lately been picked out of a dust-hole, so grimy was their look. Under the unclean window stood a small deal table, whereon a battered teapot and some unwashed cups and saucers, and some half-munched crusts of bread, lay scattered all about, and seemed as though they all had met there by the merest accident, and were not to be regarded in the light of mutual friends. Huddled in one corner, as if half-ashamed of taking so much room, and being of so little use, stood a dingy chest of drawers, with a couple of porcelain poodles, hideous to behold, and some other china ornaments, encumbering its dusty top. Half-a-dozen wooden chairs, some with a fractured leg, and some with a broken back, were scattered here and there; one lay upside down, and another had apparently been used by way of toilet-table, for on its grimy seat there lay a scrap of soap, beside a partly toothless and a wholly unclean comb. For further purposes of toilet, a tub stood on the hearth, with a little dirty water in it; and near it was a bit of ragged linen which might once have been a towel, when it lived in better days. Before the empty fireplace stood a shabby, broken fender, and in the way of fire-irons it held an old bent poker, which I hoped had not been used as an instrument of torture, or a weapon of offence.

On the wall, by way of ornament, there hung an old Dutch clock, with a dirty pair of hands and an extremely filthy face. I say, by way of ornament, for it was clearly

of no use. Both its hands were pointing idly to the figure VI., and to stir them into motion there were to be seen neither pendulum nor weights. "It ain't o' much account, or it wouldn't be a 'agin' there," remarked the old woman, with rather an air of mystery; but I own I failed to fathom the deep meaning of her words. For further mural decoration there were a pair of coloured prints—one, with a row of blooming, potted lilies and blazing, lighted candles, representing the "Interior of the Grave of the Holy Virgin," if we might believe the legend printed at the foot. The other, equally ill designed, though hardly so pretentious, depicted the "Interior of the Grave of Christ." These samples of high art were of foreign manufacture, and bore the name of "Lipschitz," in grateful recognition of their publisher's great fame. They had been bought, said the old woman, by the payment of a shilling weekly for eleven weeks. Were they put up for sale at Christie's—remote as seems the likelihood of any such event—it is doubtful if the bidding could by any means be raised to one-eleventh part of the price which they had cost.

Another tawdry print, coarsely coloured like the pair, was hung on the wall opposite; its title, "Ecce Homo," being, with the printer's name, in foreign type. The room further was embellished by a few more cheap engravings, chiefly sacred in their subject, and one coarse sporting print. Something in the sight of these decorative objects impelled me to enquire if their owner were a Catholic, and as a denial was given with some vehemence, I excused myself by saying that the name of his wife's mother had induced me to imagine him Hibernian by birth. "Shure we're Cockney-born, the hull of us," affirmed that lady forcibly, but I am free to own that there was something in her accent, as she made the affirmation, which, if noticed in a witness-box, might have been cited as a reason for a doubt of her good faith.

The dustman was her son-in-law, she proceeded to reiterate, and "a goodish sort he was, too," she furthermore remarked. He daily "arned two shillen, or it might be 'arf-a-crown," while his better half contrived, if she were lucky, to gain eighteenpence a day by labour previously described as "working at the 'Eaps." Dimly guessing what the "'Eaps" were, I shyly put a question which led to my enlightenment. "She siftes of the dust, shure, an' sortes of it out, for there's stuff in it may be as is wuth the

pickin' over, and a sellin' to the Stores." I presumed she meant the stores where the Black Doll is suspended, as a sign to attract custom. Few other stores, I fancy, would deal much in the merchandise exported from the 'Eaps.

"Walables? 'Taint likely. Shure the sarvants picks 'em out afore they gits into the dust 'ole. There ain't a blessed bone as the cook don't get a 'old on. Waste? Yis shure, she'd heard there was a sight o' waste a' times, down in the kitchen of the swells." But she did not somehow notice the crusts of bread-and-butter which lay scattered on the table, and which would probably be thrown into the dust-bin in the course of her "tidying up."

The rent of this one room was two and threepence weekly, the landlord "doing" the repairs, and the tenants too, perhaps. There were large cracks in the walls, which looked as though they were fast losing the only coat of whitewash which ever had been theirs. The little paint there was had nearly disappeared beneath the dirt that covered it. A window-pane was broken, and stuffed up with some paper, and the plaster in big patches was peeling from the ceiling, and bits of it were lying on the bed and on the floor. "Shure an' it'll be tumblin' on the boys, and crackin' of their skulls when they're asleep," said their old grandmother, her brogue getting the better of her as she poured some of the vials of her wrath upon the landlord, with whom she plainly had a feud.

On my noticing the dust-bin, just opposite the door, and remarking that it hardly could be deemed a wholesome neighbour, judging by its smell, she replied, "Deed, it taint so bad jist now. Shure 'tis in summer you should smell it." And then her anger blazed forth at the misdeeds of the neighbours—nine families there were of them—who misused their common property, and mistook the pavement for the dust-bin of the court. "They throws their stuff down anywheres a'most," she plaintively complained. "They do make me so aggarawated. 'Pon me sowl, they scatters it about for all the world like sowing seed."

We paid one or two more visits before we left the court, to which I may perhaps find reason to return. In the West, as in the East, one may be easily presented at such a court as this, and doubtless many an honest home may be discovered even dirtier than the one I have described. There may be nothing very singular in the sketch which I have drawn, and maybe

many of my readers may know where a companion picture might be made. Poverty may make a man acquainted with queer bedding as well as with strange bedfellows, and there is no reason why honesty should never dwell divorced from cleanliness of life. Still, unless upon the principle that the driver of fat oxen should himself be fat, I was puzzled to make out why the dustman's home I saw was so conspicuous for dirt. Whether any drop of Irish blood were flowing in the veins of the family who lived in it, or, if so, whether such a fact was sufficient to account for the filthiness we found—these are problems which are far too deep for my philosophy to fathom, and which the reader will excuse me from endeavouring to solve.

"BACHELOR'S HALL."

IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

THE very Rev. Dr. Pye Stephens had paid sufficiently for his nocturnal escapade, it may be thought. But the Squire, just ripe for fun, insisted that he should dress and come into the dining-room to finish the night; whilst the further penalty was inflicted of joining the chorus of the song, sung with boundless approbation by one of the company, beginning

A parson once had a remarkable foible
Of loving good liquor far more than his Bible;
His neighbours all said he was much less perplexed
In handling a tankard than in handling a text.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.

"Chevy Chase" succeeded, and the night closed with Dibdin singing his last new song, to music of his own composing, with a jolly chorus by the whole company.

Stephens was one of a class of parsons so peculiar to and characteristic of the past that we the more readily dwell upon these traits of character as they can never re-appear. He was kept in countenance by his brother rector of the neighbouring parish of Stockton, whose high-spirited hunter might have been seen waiting on the Sunday at the church door, that he might start immediately service was over for Melton Mowbray. His clerk, old Littlehales, who to more secular professions added that of village tailor, was wont to tell how his master, being in need of a pair of hunting-breeches, closed the church one Sunday in order to give him the opportunity of making them, remarking, "Hang the church! you stop at home and make the breeches." But the rector of Willey was by no means so enthusiastic a

sportsman as his brother of Stockton; on the other hand, he by no means resembled those bilious members of the profession,

Who spit their puny spite on harmless recreation.

He held, what it might be difficult to gainsay, that amusements calculated to strengthen the frame and improve the health, if fitting for gentlemen are not unfitting for clergymen. His presence, at any rate, was welcomed by neighbouring squires in the field, as "Hark in! Hark in! Hark! Voi over boys!" sounded on the morning air; and as he sat mounted on the Squire's thoroughbred it would have been difficult to detect anything of the divine; the clerical waistcoat and black single-breasted outer garment giving place to more fitting field garb. He also willingly associated with his more humble neighbours, joining in their pastimes and amusements; would sit down with them, and take a pipe and moisten his clay from a pewter tankard at a clean-scoured table in a roadside inn. As a justice of the peace he was no regarader of persons, providing they equally brought grist to his mill, and had no objection to litigants smoothing the way to a decision by presents, whether of a piece of pork, a pork-pie, or a dish of fish; but he had the misfortune once or twice to find that the fish had been caught the previous night out of his own pond. Next to a weakness for fish was one for knee-breeches and top-boots, which, in the course of much riding, required frequent renewal; and seated in a judicial chair he had the satisfaction at times of seeing a pair of new chalked-tops projecting alike from plaintiff's and defendant's pockets. In such cases, with head thrown back as though to look above petty details, he would, after sundry hums and haws and enquiries after the crops, find the evidence balanced, and suggest a compromise. A good tale was told to Dibdin of this reverend justice wanting a hare for a friend, and employing a notorious poacher to procure one. The man brought it in a bag, when the following colloquy took place. "You've brought a hare, then?" said the justice. "I have, Mr. Stephens, and a fine one too," replied the other, as he turned it out, puss flying round the room and over the table amongst the papers like a mad thing. "Kill her! kill her!" shouted Stephens. "No!" replied the poacher, who knew that by doing so he would bring himself within the law; "you kill her, I've had enough trouble to catch her." After

two or three runs the justice succeeded in hitting her on the head with the ruler, and thus brought himself within the power of the poacher, who swore that if, when he came before him again, he "did not pull him through," he would peach.

Another guest invited to meet Dibdin was Hinton, town clerk, who was called King of Wenlock. He was a match for Stephens in legal knowledge, and better posted up in Acts of Parliament; for when an Act was passed and two sent down, he kept one for his use, and the other he threw into a dark room, where hundreds more lay rotting. Among the guests also assembled were Whitmore of Apley, M.P. for a neighbouring borough; John Wilkinson, "Father of the English Iron Trade," as he has since been called, who had works on the estate, where James Watt erected the first engine made at Soho; also Thomas Turner, of Caughley, whose china is now so much sought after by collectors, and to whom Mr. Forester gave one of a pair of oil portraits, showing the squire in scarlet coat, holding a fox's brush, a painting now in possession of Hubert Smith, Esq., Town Clerk of Bridgenorth, and author of *Tent Life in Norway*, and other works.

Dibdin was made much of by these local notables, and was literally trotted out for show on neighbouring estates. One such visit was associated with a somewhat romantic incident, locally historical, and fraught with consequences anything but pleasant to a young lady, the principal personage concerned. Most of Mr. Forester's friends were "three bottle men," who, under the influence of Bacchus and the inspiration of Diana combined, sometimes allowed themselves to perform strange feats. Squire Boycott, who hunted the Shifnal country with his own hounds, was one of these, and one who, like others, had issued invitations to the host and guest of Willey, taking care to include the squire's chaplain, the Rev. Michael Pye Stephens.

A jovial company assembled, but between the invitation and the general muster an incident occurred which added to Squire Boycott's family, and which, in the ordinary course of things, might have been thought sufficient to cause the postponement of the festive gathering, but which, as the sequel will show, by original ingenuity and clever device, only served to give variety to the amusement, and to add *éclat* to the proceedings.

The conversation turned, as usual, on incidents associated with the favourite sport; much fine sherry and crusted port had been drunk, and the three bottle standard had been well-nigh reached, when the health of the generous host was given, and it occurred to the most inebriated to toast the new comer; the next step then suggested itself of naming the fair-haired stranger, who was brought down by the nurse for exhibition. The matter broached in jest was speedily debated in earnest. The family pedigree was ransacked, and every name discarded as unsuitable, when it was decided to leave it to one of the company to fix upon one suitable for the occasion, and to adopt it whatever it might be. Diana, one might have thought, would have suggested itself, but Bacchus being in the ascendant, drunken ingenuity could rise no higher than the name of Foxhunting Moll. And the Willey chaplain being in readiness, with a basin of pump-water, amid boisterous merriment and frantic shouts of whoo-whoop, tally-ho, etc., the little innocent was baptised Foxhunting Moll Boycott, without reference to any inconvenience that might ensue to the unconscious recipient of the name in after life.

As Foxhunting Moll Boycott the young lady grew up; by this singular name she was known; with it she signed all legal documents, including her marriage certificate.

It is time, however, to direct attention to the special and more direct object of Dibdin's visit to the country, which was to collect, as we have said, materials for his song of Tom Moody. The group of sporting worthies indicated had by this time seen their best days, and were content to rest on their laurels. Tom Moody, admittedly the best whipper-in in England, had gone to his grave in Barrow churchyard, followed by his favourite horse, his "Old Soul," as he called him, carrying his last fox's brush in front of his bridle, with his cap, whip, spurs, and girdle across the saddle, and, by his own special desire, three rattling view halloos had been given over his remains.

Excepting for the brief period during which he lived with Mr. Corbett, with the elder Seabright for his fellow-whip, when the Sundorne roof-trees rang to the toast of "Old Trojan," he spent his whole life at Willey. He was, in fact, what Mr. Forester made him. Nature supplied the material, and Squire Forester did the rest. He entered the squire's service when a youth, having,

like most boys of the period, been thrown upon his own resources, a state of things which fostered that self-reliance and humble heroism which help to make life wholesome. It was a feat of pluck and daring, performed on the bare back of a crop-eared cob, which gave birth to the after events of his life. His first duties were to go on errands from the Hall, and, once outside the park, he failed not to make use of his opportunities. In riding, it was generally up hill and down dale at neck-or-nothing speed, stopping neither for gate or hedge, his horse tearing away at a rate which sometimes gave him three or four somersaults at a slip; but he seldom turned his horse's head if he could help it, and if he went down he was soon up again. Extraordinary tales are told of him in sporting circles, a few only of which we give. Having a spite against a pike-keeper, for not opening the gate in time, Tom "tanselled his hide," as he called it, and next time he went that way, touching his horse on the flanks, he went over the gate, scarce starting a stitch or breaking a buckle; but on trying the same trick on another occasion, the horse went over, but the gig caught the top rail, and Tom was thrown on his back. "Just sarves you right!" was the greeting of the old pike-keeper. "It does," replied Tom, "and now we are quits," and they were friends ever after. Indeed, with or without the buff-coloured gig, there were no risks he was not prepared to run. "Aye, aye, sir," said an aged informant, "you should have seen him on his horse, a mad animal that no one but Tom could ride. Savage as he was, on a good road he would pass milestones in as many minutes, but give him green meadows, and, Lord, how I have seen him whip along the turf! He was like a winged Mercury, a regular Centaur, for he and his horse seemed one."

Tom had a famous drinking-horn which he carried with him, embellished with a hunting scene, elaborately carved with the point of a pen-knife. A windmill was at the top, and below a number of horsemen and a lady well-mounted in full chase, and hounds in full cry; in shape and size it resembled those in use in the mansions of the gentry in past years, when hospitality was dispensed with free and generous hands. It is a relic still treasured by members of the Wheatland Hunt, who look back to the time when Moody's shrill voice cheered the pack over the heavy Wheatlands, and is made to do duty at

annual social gatherings. Tom was deemed "the best whipper-in in England;" none, it was said, could bring up the tail end of a pack, or sustain the burst of a long chase, and be in at the death with every hound well up, like him.

His voice was something extraordinary, and capable of wonderful modulation; to hear him recount the sports of the day in the big kitchen at the hall, and to give his tally-ho or who-who-hoop was a treat. On one occasion, when in better trim than usual, the old housekeeper remarked: "La, Tom! you have given the who-who-hoop, as you call it, so very loud and strong to-day that you set the cups and saucers a-dancing!" To which a gentleman, who had purposely placed himself within hearing, replied that he was not at all surprised, for he had never heard anything so imposing or attractive, some of the tones being as fine and mellow as a French-horn.

Tom was a frequent visitor at "Hangster's Gate," a wayside inn, where the coaches called; a cheerful glass, he was wont to say, would hurt nobody; and he could toss off a horn or two of the strongest "old October" without moving a muscle or winking an eye; and whilst he could get up early and sniff the morning air or fragrant gale they did not appear to tell; but the spark in his throat which required such frequent libations finally told upon him, and finding his end approaching, he expressed a desire to see his old master. "I have," he said to the squire, "one request to make, and it is the last favour I shall crave; it is that when I am dead I may be buried under the yew-tree in Barrow Churchyard, and be carried there by six earth-stoppers; my old horse with whip, boots, spurs, and cap, slung on each side of the saddle; the brush of the last fox when I was up at the death, at the side of the forelock, and two couples of hounds to follow as mourners. When I am laid in the grave, let three halloos be given over me; and if I do not then lift up my head, you may fairly conclude that Tom Moody's dead." Moody's last wish was carried out to the letter, and a shout was given by the side of the open grave which made the welkin ring.

Such were the facts placed before Dibdin, who faithfully adhered to them in his song.

When the song first came out, Charles Incedon by "human voice divine" was drawing vast audiences at Drury Lane. On play-bills, in largest type, forming the

most attractive item of the bill of fare, this song, varied by others of Dibdin's composition, would be seen. When it was first announced to be sung a few fox-hunting friends of the squire went from Willey to London to hear it. Taking up their positions in the pit they were all attention, as the inimitable singer rolled out, with that full volume of voice which delighted and astounded his audience, the verse commencing,

You all knew Tom Moody, the whipper-in, well,
but the singer not succeeding to the satisfaction of this small knot of fox-hunters in the "tally-ho chorus," they jumped upon the stage and gave the audience a specimen of what Shropshire lungs could do.

The song soon seized upon the sporting mind, and became popular the country through. The London publishers took it up, and sold it with the music, together with illustrations, and it soon found a ready sale.

On leaving Willey, Mr. Forester asked Dibdin how he could best discharge the obligation he felt himself under for his services. The great ballad-writer, whom Pitt pensioned, replied that he would have nothing; he had been so well treated that he could not accept anything. Finding artifice necessary, Mr. Forester asked him to deliver a letter personally at his banker's on his arrival in London. Of course Dibdin consented, and on doing so found it was an order to pay him a hundred pounds.

Tom died November, 1796, and was currently reported to reappear on the ground of his former exploits, a tradition embodied in the following lines:

See the shade of Tom Moody, you all have known well,

To our sports now returning, not liking to dwell,
In a region where pleasure's not found in the chase,
So Tom's just returned to view his old place.
No sooner the hounds leave the kennels to try,
Than his spirit appears to join in the cry;
Now all with attention, his signal well mark,
For see his hands up for the cry of hark! hark!
Then cheer him and mark him—Tally-ho!

Boys! Tally-ho!

The Squire, who survived his old servant, lived on during the troubled period of the threatened invasion by the French Minister of Marine, and raised and equipped a corps called the Wenlock Loyal Volunteers, which he commanded and supported at his own cost. This was disbanded in 1802, but he raised another in 1803, when beacons were erected, and bonfires prepared on the Wrekin, and other hills the country through, as the means of transmitting the news of the approach of the enemy.

The Squire's fox-hunters readily joined,

and made an imposing show if they did nothing else, their uniform being handsome. The coat was scarlet, turned up with yellow; the trousers and waistcoat were white, the hat was a cube with red and white feathers for the grenadiers, and green for the light company.

Bachelor's Hall resounded with the clang of arms, with sound of drums and fifes, and patriotic songs. Clarionets and bugles were to be seen piled with guns and accoutrements, putting deer-horns, foxes' heads, and cabinets of oak, black as ebony, out of countenance. The Willey tenantry became as familiar with military bands as with the sound of church bells; they were often heard, in fact, together, Sunday being the day usually selected for drill, for heavy war-taxes were laid, and people had to work hard to pay them, which they did ungrudgingly. Open house was kept at Willey, and no baron of olden time dealt out hospitality more willingly or liberally. The Squire was here, there, and everywhere, visiting neighbouring squires, giving or receiving information, stirring up the gentry, and frightening the country people out of their wits. Boney became a name more terrible than bogey, alike to children and grown-up people, and the more vague the notion of invasion, the more horrible were the evils dreaded.

Parson Stephens found Boney in the Revelations, and preached about him to gaping congregations. But Boney did not come, the invasion did not take place, the excitement passed away, and time hung heavy on the hands of the Squire, who no longer found incentives to an active life. Years, too, were beginning to tell upon the veteran sportsman, reminding him that his career was drawing to a close. He made arrangements accordingly in perfect keeping with the character he had displayed through life. He expressed a wish that those who had known him best should be chosen to attend his funeral; that the servants who had experienced his kindness should carry him to his tomb when the sun had gone down and the work of the day was over; that each, too, should have a guinea, that he might meet his neighbour, if he chose, and talk over the merits and demerits of the old master. His estate he left to his cousin Cecil, who became the first Lord Forester, father of the present Right Hon. Lord Forester. He died on the 13th of July, 1811, in the seventy-third year of his age, and was buried by torch-

light—rather an imposing sight—beneath the family pew, in the church founded and endowed by the lords of Willey at a remote period, which stands within the shadow of the old Hall, and might, from its appearance, have formed the text of Gray's ivy-mantled tower, being covered with a luxuriant growth of this clinging evergreen to the very top. Peering through small Norman windows, which admit a sober light, glimpses are obtained of costly monuments, with names, titles, and escutcheons, but the Squire's tomb itself remains uninscribed. Near it, however, a marble tablet erected by Cecil Weld, the first Lord Forester, bears this simple record: "To the Memory of my late Cousin and Benefactor, George Forester, Esq., Willey Park, May 10, 1821."

JOHN DOLBY'S GOLD SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

OF all oddly-assorted friendships, that between John Dolby and Oswald Vandeleur was surely the strangest. It bewildered even the miners of Hobbing's Gulch—a rough, rollicking sample by no means prone to gratuitous speculation concerning mysteries in either earth or heaven. In the pauses of the alternative digging and card-playing the relations between the pair formed a prominent feature of camp conversation.

"I reckon there's mor'n the surface shows, mates, in the business," remarked Brum Buckles, who had gained his sobriquet from the possession of a couple of enormous brace ornaments presumably hailing from the capital of the British Midlands.

"As you hope is the case with your claim down valley—eh, Brum?" suggested Freckled Sam ironically.

A hoarse laugh ran round the group. It was known that a consistent run of bad luck had not yet made the man of jewellery less sanguine than at the commencement of his arduous adventure.

"Exactly. So I firmly believe it is," he replied.

"De younker ob de two bredren is such a——"

"Ninny," interpolated somebody.

"Ye-es, ninny," continued Dutch Joe, with all the air of a magistrate giving an irreversible decree of condemnation.

"And Dolby's never pre-cisely posed as a fool—fit for cap and bells—'fore this, I

calkerlate," drawled Dick Archer, in unmistakable Yankee tones.

"No, that's what beats us," said Brum Buckles, returning to the charge; "that's what makes me vow as there's more in the affair than we can guess at all easy like. Dolby and Van are always together nowadays, and——"

The speech was cut short by the creaking of the cabin-door on its rusty hinges, and the entry of the very "younker," so contemptuously discussed.

Oswald Vandeleur—a name quickly abbreviated to "Van" at Hobbing's Gulch—was in appearance a mere boy compared to the bronzed and weather-beaten miners amongst whom his present lot was cast. By the record of a register away in a quiet English village, his years numbered on this 10th of March, 1862, just twenty-three; but no casual observer would have given him credit for the odd numeral. He was slim and upright of figure, with a fair, frank face, revealing, like a transparent window, every changing mood of the soul within. He had dreamy blue eyes, and soft, curling locks above which gave him in certain lights an almost effeminate delicacy. It was this, and a sadness which seemed unconquerable, that had procured him his reputation for weakness and ultra-simplicity amongst his out-cast companions.

His errand at Norford's store was to replenish a supply of camp "dips," and was soon accomplished. With a bow to the general company which made several feel vaguely their own utter lack of polish (and so insensibly increased the prejudice against him) he withdrew.

The half-mile between the store and his own shabby little tent was not passed without an encounter with the one friend Oswald Vandeleur had contrived to make at Hobbing's Gulch.

In physique and physiognomy, at least, John Dolby was a striking contrast to his protégé. If Vandeleur looked three years younger than in truth he was, Dolby, on the contrary, appeared ten years older. He was a big, burly fellow, somewhere in the thirties, with careworn, deeply-lined face, scrubby beard, brown eyes, and hair already streaked with grey. And up to this hour he had been one of the most reticent men in camp. Now he drew the lad's arm tightly within his own, and walked back to Van's shanty.

"I want to have a talk—may be to tell you my story, in return for yours," he said.

Oswald Vandeleur was too surprised to do more than incoherently mumble his eagerness to play the part of an attentive listener. The idea that there was an inscrutable mystery in Dolby's career—perhaps a mystery of pain and crime—had long since fixed itself in Van's mind as well as in the minds of his neighbours. In these matters there is frequently a nameless contagion of belief. Was the boy destined to be taken into a confidence which none other in the tiny makeshift town would ever be asked to share?

It was even so. But first there was a still more startling surprise in store.

"They are wondering, yonder, at Norford's store, I haven't a doubt, how it is that you and I hob-and-nob so much, Van. Seems passing queer to 'em. Can you explain it?"

"Only that—that you are very kind, Mr. Dolby."

"Kind! may be I am. We'll see directly. Any luck to-day, Van?"

"No, nor ever will be, I'm fearing. Dutch Joe was about right, who told me in that barbarous lingo of his—wish they could hear him at Hibbledale!—that the claim was clean played out. 'Tis a dull prospect."

The gloom upon Van's face, which had brightened a little at mention of his distant Devonshire home, thickened into a more impenetrable cloud than ever.

"And your western Maggie—your Daisy—will have to wait yet a bit longer for the news that her lover's fortune is made?"

Vandeleur first frowned, and then gave a hollow, hoarse laugh. If this was meant for pleasantry on Dolby's part it was singularly ill-timed.

"I suppose so," he said.

There was a pause, and both men watched in an outwardly moody silence the flickering spark on the broken bottle that served for candlestick.

Then Dolby spoke:

"Well, tell 'em at Norford's store—them who are anxious for the information, a new pickaxe 'ud be more useful—tell 'em that I took a fancy to Oswald Vandeleur because Fortune had seemingly taken a spite against him. Because he's in love, and means to win the girl he loves, in spite of a guardian whose only creed is 'gold to gold.' Because I saw that he was homesick, as I've been many and many a day. Because he took me for what I am—an honest man! and laid bare the emotions of his inmost heart before me. Tell 'em that!"

It was a strange, almost an eerie monologue, and Van could only listen in an astonishment not unmingled with terror. Had trouble turned Dolby's brain? The fierce, passionate emphasis with which the declaration of integrity was uttered lent a measure of colour to the paralysing supposition.

And the sudden change of tone and subject which followed did not tend to disabuse the young man of his awful fear.

"But your luck is better, Van, than you think," Dolby continued. "I've struck a lode at last, after years of waiting, here and elsewhere, and nobody knows it but myself. I'll sell it to you, for a few shillings down, just to make the bargain square, and not a gift. In a week or two you'll be rich; in a month or two you can go back to your Hibbledale and marry Maggie."

The scared, searching enquiry of the boy's glance disclosed once more what was passing in his thoughts.

"Oh, I am sane enough—never more so; and every syllable I've uttered is true," Dolby said.

Van flushed, and a wild tide of conflicting emotions swept upwards from his heart and stayed even an attempt at speech. Was the offer genuine? Were the facts as stated? What could be the key to such unparalleled magnanimity?

"I am afraid—I do not quite understand," he contrived at length to gasp.

"'Tis a simple proposal too. I've got a gold secret for which the fellows yonder—every man-jack of them—would slave night and day till they dropped, and it's yours for the taking—on one condition only."

"And that?"

"Is—to believe me. Come, as I said at the beginning, I'll give you, in as few words as I can, the story of a ruined life."

The lines about the wrinkled face took a fresh harshness, the eyes were fixed and dilated, the voice resonant and high-pitched. It was evident that the proposed recapitulation of bygone wrongs must give acute pain.

Van chivalrously interposed to stay the narrative, but Dolby took no heed of his protest. It may be questioned if he even heard it.

"I, like you, am country born and reared," he said; "a quaint old town sequestered amidst the lovely Berkshire lanes was the home of my youth, and I too have loved in vain! I was cashier in the Grenbury Bank, and one day there fell a frightful blow upon me. A forgery was committed, and suspicion turned in my

direction. The evidence, I admit, was black—black, but half false. I was tried before a merciful jury, and escaped. But everybody believed me guilty, nevertheless. I dared not go back home. The stain was upon me. I should have been shunned by all. Even Agnes would have scorned me!" A rare and touching tone, as of far-off music, was in the faltering accents. "I emigrated, and have been a wanderer ever since."

"I am very sorry for you," Van murmured.

The simple, grave sympathy nearly broke the strong man down. He paused and contracted his brows into a frown that would assuredly have cowed and disturbed even Freckled Sam, who had the repute of being the most dare-devil member of the Hobbing's Gulch community. That frown alone prevented the dropping of a great salt tear. The spasm of tumultuous feeling passed, and Dolby resumed:

"And to-night I offer you wealth—to me, after all, of little value—for faith that I am innocent. One being in the world shall believe that I had neither part nor lot in that crime."

"And without what you propose I do so believe. I am sure of it!" Van replied warmly.

"That is well, then; I thank you. And you will go to England, and if by any chance you hear the story there, and I am accused——"

"I will declare that John Dolby is as incapable of such a crime as the child in his mother's arms. But, indeed, sir, I cannot rob you of your reward thus!"

"Pshaw! You will obey, Van," the other said sternly; "anyhow, I shall strike no pick into that lode. I leave Hobbing's Gulch to-morrow for ever. 'Tis a dreary place at best."

"I have found it so," said Vandeleur.

"Come now, and I will show you the spot."

The two went out into the chill night breeze together, the man's pulses slowly subsiding into their wonted calm—what to him was the abandonment of gold after loss of character—the boy's beating high and yet higher with mingled hope, bewilderment, and gratitude. It was a strange errand, and they were a strange couple.

Within four-and-twenty hours a throng—facsimile of the earlier one—was discussing at Norford's store two pieces of camp intelligence. The first, and, as they held, most important, was that Oswald Vandeleur had made a rich discovery of precious metal; the second, that John Dolby had left for San Francisco.

CHAPTER II.

If possession is nine-tenths of the law, as we are so frequently assured, continual proximity to the object of his affections is at least half-way towards victory in the lover's battle. Combined with his rival's abrupt disappearance, and the arguments of Sir Frederick Mitton, it had nearly won the fight for Eustace Ross.

At first Maggie Hayes had been frigid and difficult of approach as an arctic iceberg. Then she had thawed into the sublimest indifference, a phase equally awkward and tantalising to the eager wooer. Lastly, she had come to listen with forbearance and a measure of cordiality, if not with something more, to Eustace's soft speeches. The rumour flitted about Hibbledale that the pair were "engaged," and Maggie knew that this was so. Even in suffering the report to pass uncontradicted, and continuing her favours to the suitor, she was in a sense deliberately forecasting a very probable future. Her uncle wished her to marry this man. Eustace was handsome and apparently well-to-do. Where could the objection be?

And at this moment Oswald Vandeleur returned with a well-lined purse, older, browner, as much in love as ever.

Maggie was gone on a visit—he had a difficulty in discovering where. It was quite settled, so said the Hibbledale hotel-keeper, that she was to marry, in the ensuing summer, Mr. Eustace Ross. This was the early news for which Oswald had been hungering, with a vengeance! In high dudgeon he went off to Grenbury.

A cynic—at least in this instance—has defined gratitude as the lively sense of favours to come. But Oswald Vandeleur subscribed to an opposite and more old-fashioned creed. All the way home he had been revolving in his mind how he could repay his eccentric comrade of the western wilderness on the lines John Dolby had himself marked out. He had resolved to devote both time and money—was not the latter John Dolby's own?—to the unravelling of the ancient mystery. And alighting at the Grenbury station, he stood on the threshold of his self-imposed task.

The bank forgery? Oh yes; it was well-remembered in the lazy provincial town. The bank cashier was undoubtedly the culprit; one Dolby, a tall, fine-built fellow, and wonderfully liked for such a rogue. He was tried for it. To be sure he got off, through some swerve of Dame Justice's descending sword. But nobody

believed him innocent. He absconded from Grenbury immediately after his acquittal; that fact alone was sufficient proof of criminality for simple folk. This was the summary of the local judgment.

"And he was as guiltless as I am of that past deed," Oswald boldly declared. "I know him well, and have no doubt at all upon the matter."

An incredulous smile and some shrugging of the shoulders showed the unutterable conviction of each and every listener.

"What is more, I have come here for the express purpose of proving it," Oswald said; and then even some degree of anger mingled with the rustic surprise. Who or what was this would-be upsetter of accepted and common-sense theories?

Oswald threw his whole soul into his undertaking, and when a man does that, the lions in any path are apt to dwindle into very harmless and diminutive beasts indeed. He made elaborate enquiry in every quarter from whence the least light was to be expected. He ransacked official records of his friend's trial, and subjected the evidence to a more exhaustive scrutiny than it had received in either the Grenbury police-court or the Ickworth assize-room. Ultimately he constructed a theory of his own, and the central figure in this, as yet far from perfect outline, was one Richard Poulton, a clerk in the Grenbury Bank at the time of the forgery. Poulton also had vanished from the Berkshire town within twelve months of Dolby's acquittal, and Oswald was convinced that he and not the cashier had been the real criminal.

The question of how to prove it was more difficult of solution. But a kindly fate smiled once more on the young man's enthusiastic endeavour. Aid came from an humble but exceedingly authoritative source. In the course of his investigations Oswald had had occasion to interview an old man who had till recently acted as the bank porter and general factotum. From him he had at first gleaned little. Peter Swales was in the last stage of physical decay, and persistent questioning seemed cruel. Oswald acquainted the sufferer with his errand, was told that Peter had few reminiscences to offer, and went away, not proposing to return. He was sent for.

"I cannot die wi' a sin o' this sort upon my conscience," the old man groaned. "You be Mister Dolby's friend, bean't you?"

"Yes."

"And want to show as he didn't do that as ruined him?"

"Such is my object."

"Nor more he didn't. 'Twas Richard Poulton, an' I 'elped him, for—for fifty pun as he gie me. Atween us we worked it as Dolby was thought the party. But Dolby had nought to do wi' it. 'Twas a black business—a black business! I've niver bin easy night nor day since. 'Tis that has as mostly broken me down. I'll made a clean breast of it now."

Visited by the bank proprietor and a local police-inspector, the penitent told his story at length, and his depositions were taken.

"It is a most wretched affair," said Mr. Mavis, as he and Oswald walked away together from the riverside hovel. "In six months time John Dolby would have married my niece, and have become a partner in my firm. I never could understand how he threw away all his chances, unless it was at the bidding of some sudden and overwhelming temptation, such as we sometimes read of but seldom witness. The blow wrecked my niece's life also. Agnes loved him, and has never married."

"The next step will be, if possible, to find Poulton?"

"Yes; I shouldn't wonder if he were safely out of England—the scoundrel!"

"You can describe him pretty accurately, I suppose, Mr. Mavis?"

"I have his photograph at home. Come in and see it, Mr. Vandeleur."

Oswald readily accepted the invitation. He was curious to scan the lineaments of the unscrupulous villain who had built up his own fortune upon the broken hearts of those who had never wronged him. This was worse even than the theft of the gold.

A carte-de-visite was produced, and Oswald recognised Eustace Ross.

For a full minute—to use a hackneyed but convenient metaphor—the amateur detective was smitten into stone. Every vestige of colour fled from his cheeks—speech was impossible. He could only stand paralysed and helpless before this presentment of a double-dyed traitor.

The banker was lynx-eyed and observed his agitation.

"You have seen this face before to-day, Mr. Vandeleur?" he said.

The query recalled Oswald to the problem of the moment.

"I have, and I believe that I know Richard Poulton's present whereabouts," he answered; "he is residing under an assumed name in the Devonshire village which has been for years my own home."

"Wheel within wheel," Mr. Mavis said.

"He is passing for a gentleman——"

"On borrowed capital—to employ a polite euphemism."

"And he is actually wooing a young lady who is the ward of a baronet—of Sir Frederick Mitton, of Mitton Court. When I was last in Hibbledale the story went that the young couple would be man and wife by August."

"If that prophecy is to be fulfilled, the next few hours must witness the ceremony," dryly remarked Mr. Mavis; "for after that brief respite he is likely, I should say, to spend a fair stretch of years 'in durance vile.'"

Oswald Vandeleur's knocking to and fro in a hard and censorious world had given him a somewhat more effectual control of his feelings than he could have boasted at Hobbing's Gulch. Moreover, there was surely excuse on the surface for considerable emotion. The banker little guessed with what keen personal interest and deep soul-relief his young acquaintance had received this latter revelation.

The thinnest gleam of the most watery sunshine brings joy to the weary watcher, after the blackness and turmoil of a prolonged storm. And a hope was springing up in Oswald's heart that this unexpected outburst of potential deliverance might prove far more than a gleam.

He was not disappointed.

The sword of Damocles, of which Richard Poulton, alias Eustace Ross, had remained in a profound ignorance up to the last moment, had fallen, and all the gossips of Hibbledale were discussing the romantic unmasking of a villain and a hypocrite.

Maggie Hayes was back in the village now, and knew all. As chance would have it—arranging its tableaux better than any dramatist could scheme—Oswald and Maggie met, for the first time since Oswald's departure, on the broad plantation pathway that fringed Sir Frederick Mitton's park. With a pretty, fawn-like gesture of surprise the girl darted forward. Somehow, without the need of words—neither could have quite explained it—the lovers were locked in a close embrace.

"And did you really dare to think that I could ever have cared for that man, Oswald?"

"I was informed that you were engaged to marry him."

"And you believed it?"

"I fear I had but little option. I was aware of Sir Frederick's predilection in my rival's favour. But all is well that ends well, Maggie. I can even feel pity for Poulton this afternoon—miscreant as he is."

Events had so flagrantly proved the incorrectness of Sir Frederick Mitton's judgment that that gentleman deemed his only resource a reluctant submission to his ward's wishes. Long before the harvest-shocks had begun to gleam and sway in summer breezes on the Devonshire hillsides, Oswald and Maggie Vandeleur had set up a happy if unostentatious home of their own. Hibbledale was not robbed of its excitement in the matter of a wedding, after all.

There remained the fullness of reparation to John Dolby. Advertisements were inserted in English, American, and colonial papers ad libitum. But for two years with no success. Then, in a roundabout way, a message did come. John Dolby had embarked for England on board a Cunard steamer.

"And you will take back what is, in common truth and honesty, your own, Mr. Dolby?" Oswald said. "Now that we are married, my wife's fortune——"

"Say no more—not a syllable!" interrupted the wanderer, with a frown that vividly recalled to his companion's mind the memorable conversation in a mountain shanty on the evening of Oswald's twenty-third birthday. "You have done far more for me; and you bought the claim by miner's law equitably enough. No, no; the debt is mine to-day. You have given me back the very bank partnership for which I toiled in those past years, my character, and—Agnes!"

And with this decision, Oswald was forced to remain content.

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LIFE POLICIES are issued upon different scales of premium to meet special purposes—see Tables below and others in Company's Prospectus.

80 per cent. of the profits of their Class are divided amongst the Participating Assured.

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Policies issued in accordance with *The Married Women's Property Act*, passed by Parliament in the year 1882, which gives power to a Married Woman to assure her Husband's life or her own, and to a Married Man to assure his own life for the special benefit of his wife, or wife and children; in all such cases the Policy being free from the control of the Husband, his representatives or creditors.

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TABLE A. WITHOUT BONUS						TABLE B. WITH PARTICIPATION IN PROFITS					
Age next Birthday	PAYMENTS.		Age next Birthday	PAYMENTS.		Age next Birthday	PAYMENTS.		Age next Birthday	PAYMENTS.	
	Yearly.	Half-yearly		Yearly.	Half-yearly		Yearly.	Half-yearly		Yearly.	Half-yearly
20	£1 13 7	£0 17 4	45	£3 6 4	£1 14 2	20	£1 17 8	£0 19 6	45	£3 16 0	£1 19 2
25	1 17 8	0 19 5	50	3 19 8	2 1 0	25	2 2 11	1 2 2	50	4 11 3	2 7 0
30	2 2 6	1 1 11	55	4 17 5	2 10 2	30	2 9 3	1 5 5	55	5 14 8	2 19 0
35	2 8 6	1 5 0	60	6 1 6	3 2 9	35	2 16 3	1 9 0	60	7 5 11	3 15 4
40	2 16 3	1 9 0	65	7 14 8	4 0 2	40	3 5 6	1 13 9	65	9 0 9	4 13 8

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FIRE DEPARTMENT.

General Reserve and Fire Re-Insurance Fund - £1,500,000.

THE MAGNITUDE OF THE COMPANY'S BUSINESS enables it to accept Fire risks upon the most favourable terms, the same being rated according to the nature of the risk to be insured.

Some risks of a special and complicated nature, such as Mills, to ensure fair and equitable rating, are rated according to Tariffs carefully compiled by the Offices, and revised from time to time to meet the altered circumstances affecting any particular class.

The majority of risks, however, are subject to no tariff, but are rated by this Company according to their individual merits, based upon the law of average—the principle upon which Insurance Companies are founded. By this law the Company, owing to the large number of risks on its books, is enabled to insure the different classes at their minimum rates. An individual is therefore imprudent to run his own risk when the Company can relieve him of the danger of loss at the smallest possible cost.

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Prospectuses and Forms of Proposal for Fire, Life, or Annuities may be obtained at the Company's Offices, or of any Agents of the Company.

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PROVIDENT LIFE OFFICE

50, Regent Street, W., & 14, Cornhill, E.C.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

Held at the Office, 50, Regent Street, London, on Wednesday, 30th January, 1884.

The Directors have to report that the transactions of the PROVIDENT LIFE OFFICE during the year 1883 have been highly satisfactory.

Proposals for new Assurances amounting to £679,080 were received. Policies for £575,520 were issued and taken up, producing new annual Premiums amounting to £19,770, as against £19,211 for the previous year. These Assurances and new annual Premiums respectively represent the actual net amounts. No re-assurances were effected during the year.

The Proposals, declined and not completed, amounted to £103,560.

The Claims for the year were £192,253, being £29,416 more than the corresponding sum for 1882.

The Annual Income is now £310,371, being an increase of £9,398.

During the year the sum of £19,020 was paid for the surrender of Policies. The values paid upon Bonus Policies ranged from 33 per cent.—the minimum surrender value—to as much as 93½ per cent. of the Premiums received.

The total Funds of the Office on the 31st of December last were £2,323,284, being an increase of £24,197, a result very satisfactory considering the special extra payments required to be made on account of the recent division of Profits. The average interest realised was £4 5s. 6d. per cent. as against £4 4s. during 1882.

The large measure of public support received by the PROVIDENT LIFE OFFICE—as shown in the still increasing amount of new business—is gratifying evidence that persons desirous of effecting Assurances are wisely alive to the advantages given by an Office which has all the experience to be gained from a successful existence of seventy-eight years, and which is ready to adapt its practice to the requirements of the present day.

W. S. BEAUMONT,

Chairman.

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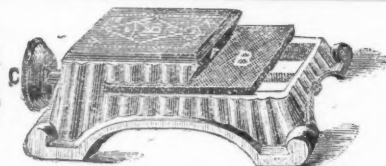
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